

News Release

Senator Pete V. Domenici

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JUNE 1, 2000

DOMENICI SEEKS \$1.9 MILLION FOR LAS CRUCES COURTHOUSE

WASHINGTON -- When the Senate Appropriations Committee meets later this month to begin outlining funding for federal law enforcement activities, it will consider Senator Pete Domenici's request for \$1.9 million for site and design work for a court annex to the Runnels Federal Building in Las Cruces to address growing security caseload concerns.

Domenici, a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, is seeking the Las Cruces funding, as well as funding for the Columbus and Santa Teresa ports of entry and the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in Artesia, through the **FY 2001 Treasury and General Government Appropriations Bill**. Domenici stressed that funding for law enforcement projects nationwide will be very tight this year.

"The current facilities utilized by the Las Cruces federal court are woefully inadequate and potentially dangerous to law enforcement and court personnel, as well as the public," Domenici said. "The existing Runnels Federal Building was not built for use as a courthouse, and as a result, there are no separate and secure prisoner intake areas or holding cells."

"These funds would be used to design an annex to the existing Runnels Federal Building to accommodate the court's projected space needs. The construction of the annex will mitigate substandard conditions and serious security deficiencies under which the current court is operating," he said.

The existing Runnels Federal Building provides space for the district court, including magistrate judge functions, the U.S. Marshals Service, and the probation office. However, a delay in the annex project would cause the probation office to move to leased space, which is already the case for pretrial services and the U.S. Attorney's offices. In addition, there is only one elevator, which is used by judges, jurors, court personnel, prisoners and the general public.

Domenici recently participated in a District Court conference with judicial officials from the Southwest border districts to address the dramatic increase in caseloads over the past five years, primarily due to growing numbers of illegal immigrants and drug cases along the border.

By 2002, the five federal border judicial districts, namely the Southern District of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and the Southern and Western Districts of Texas, will handle almost one-third of all federal criminal cases in the United States. In New Mexico, the Las Cruces federal court now handles 65 percent of all federal criminal cases in the state.

“The growth in the Las Cruces area and the caseload handled by the courts necessitates our working to make more space available as soon as possible,” Domenici said.

The proposed annex would be constructed on a government-owned site adjacent to the Runnels Federal Building.

Also of interest to southern New Mexico, Domenici said he is seeking \$8.13 million in federal funding to support U.S. Customs operations at the Columbus and Santa Teresa border stations, including resources to police the U.S. border with Mexico and facilitate cross-border trade. In February, Domenici met with U.S. Customs Service Commissioner Raymond Kelly to tour and assess needs along the border crossings.

The \$8.13 million in requests, developed in consultation with the New Mexico Border Authority, include these basic infrastructure improvements:

Columbus Border Station, \$5 million total request

- C \$2.5 million to construct an additional 16-truck capacity commercial inspection dock and related cargo office space; there are currently only four docks available to process commercial traffic, which increased by nearly 100 percent between 1997 and 1998, and another 23 percent in 1999;
- C \$500,000 to construct an additional four non-commercial, secondary inspection bays and related office/observation decks;
- C \$500,000 to construct additional main building office space for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Immigration and Naturalization Service and common areas, and additional employee parking spaces; and,
- C \$1.5 million for related design, management and contingency requirements for these facilities.

Santa Teresa Border Station, \$3.15 million total request

- C \$1.5 million to construct an additional 25-truck capacity commercial inspection dock and related cargo office space, which will allow Santa Teresa to expand its commercial inspections capabilities; and,
- C \$1.65 million for electronic inspection equipment upgrades to improve commercial traffic processing, including a second portable Vehicle and Cargo Container

Inspection System, a pallet x-ray inspection system.

For the **Federal Law Enforcement Training Center** (FLETC) in Artesia, Domenici is requesting \$6.9 million for specific construction needs at the southern New Mexico facility. Specifically, the lawmaker is seeking \$4.2 million to construct a steel targeting outdoor range and firearms range office building, and \$1.7 million to fund FLETC's portion of a new water tower project for Artesia.

"The Artesia FLETC facility has become a critical resource for federal agencies, especially in the western states," Domenici said. "These projects are needed at FLETC if the facility is to continue to provide quality training programs, as well as meet the demand for new trained agents at the federal law enforcement agencies."

The \$4.2 million for firearms ranges at the facility has been identified in FLETC's five-year construction plan and are needed to provide quality training program to federal law enforcement personnel. The administration has requested additional personnel for the Border Patrol, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and the Secret Service who will need training this year.

FLETC's construction plan also uncovered a deficiency in water availability for both the facility and the city of Artesia. In recent discussions with the city, a proposal was made to construct a new water tower jointly. FLETC would be responsible for \$1.7 million for the project, with the city covering \$700,000 of the initial cost along with annual operations and maintenance.

"A cost-shared program between FLETC and the city of Artesia would be mutually beneficial to both and would mitigate serious safety concerns at FLETC. This is a project that should not be delayed, and with cost-sharing, could be executed immediately," Domenici said.